

Appendix 1: Michael Balint – a man of many parts

Michael Balint was born Mihaly Bergsmann, the son of a general practitioner in Budapest, Hungary. After serving in the First World War, he qualified in medicine, marrying his first wife, Alice, shortly afterwards. Together they began studying psychoanalysis under the guidance of Sandor Ferenczi, one of Freud's most distinguished pupils. In 1919 the political climate in Hungary became unstable and the psychoanalysts in Budapest moved to Berlin. Here, at the same time as working as a biochemist, Balint began using psychoanalysis in the treatment of patients with psychosomatic disorders and, following some personal analysis with Hanns Sachs, he began a series of seminars with family doctors.

The Balints returned to Budapest in 1924. In 1939 they fled from the impending Nazi invasion of Europe and settled in England, where Michael obtained his British medical qualifications. Following the tragic death of his first wife, he subsequently married a second time and later moved from Manchester to take up a post at the Tavistock Clinic in London, practising and teaching psychoanalysis. Following his divorce, he began to collaborate with Mrs Enid Eicholz (who was to become his third wife) in running some case discussion seminars for marriage guidance social workers. He was able to introduce a number of innovations there, including asking seminar participants to present their cases without notes.

In 1951 the Balints began their seminars for general practitioners at the Tavistock Clinic, and his reflections on these appeared later in *The Doctor, His Patient and the Illness*,² which was to become a classic within the profession. Balint groups (as they were now called) were started overseas. He also wrote a number of texts on psychoanalytic theory and practice, in particular *Thrills and Regressions* (1959)⁴⁹ and *The Basic Fault* (1968).⁵⁰ In 1968 he became President of the British Psychoanalytic Society.

Towards the end of his life he conducted some Balint seminars for medical students at University College Hospital in London that were greatly appreciated by many of those who took part.⁵¹ He died of a heart attack in December 1970, whilst Enid continued to be actively engaged with Balint groups until her death in 1994.

Harold Stewart⁵² has written both of Michael Balint's generosity, understanding and aversion to authoritarianism, and its opposites: that '*he could be provocative, high-handed, scornful and authoritarian. He could be loved or hated, but it was difficult to be indifferent to him. He greatly valued independence of thought, together with strong argument. . . . Such people are essential if psychoanalysis is to continue to develop.*'